

## THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE



WASHINGTON, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

MEMORANDUM FOR THE HONORABLE EDWIN MEESE III, COUNSELLOR TO THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Manned Space Station

(S) The 1 December Cabinet Council meeting underscored the fact that there is little support in government, the scientific community, or the private sector for NASA's proposal to initiate development of a manned space station. The substance of the arguments opposing a commitment at this time can be summarized as follows:

- The NASA \$8B cost estimate is suspect. It would appear to represent only a fraction of the likely cost to achieve the advertised results. The total program probably would cost on the order of \$30B or more.
- US commitment to a manned space station would be better characterized as a major engineering effort rather than a bold new space initiative. In the afterglow of the Soviet emphasis on a manned space station, a similar US initiative may be perceived as an effort to emulate or "catch up" with the Soviets.
- Undertaking an engineering project of this magnitude would divert NASA expertise and resources from the task of pressing the frontiers of technology along lines more likely to produce economic and scientific benefits for the nation.
- The US will soon be totally dependent on the STS for access to space. NASA's primary focus during the immediate future should be on achieving a fully operational and cost effective space transportation system.
- The President is committed to a number of programs demanding major resources including strategic force modernization and strategic defense. One should not further stress our resource constrained environment with any initiative that does not promise extraordinary return. The manned space station does not meet this criterion.

(U) We support the thrust of Jay Keyworth's proposal for a "space summit" to assemble the best talent in the industrial and scientific communities and to chart bold new directions for the civil space program. From such a conference could emerge the national consensus that should be the precondition to any major undertaking of this nature. At the least, it would provide the President a range of options to weigh in the dual context of national security and space leadership.

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(U) In sum, we strongly recommend deferring commitment to the NASA space station proposal at this time. Instead, we recommend pursuing the "space summit" as a matter of priority.

(U) We stand ready to assist in any way possible.

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